WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer instruction comprises:

a write queue descriptor count instruction that causes a processor to write a single word containing a queue count for each of a plurality of queue entries in a queue array cache.

2. The instruction of claim 1 further comprising:

an address field that specifies a location in memory of a queue descriptor.

3. The instruction of claim 1 further comprising:

an entry field that specifies a location of a queue descriptor in the queue array cache.

4. A method comprising:

in a processor, maintaining a count field for queue descriptors of active output queues current in a memory.

5. The method of claim 4 in which the count field is a word.

6. The method of claim 4 further comprising:

writing the count field subsequent to incrementing a count of buffers for a selected queue.

7. The method of claim 4 further comprising:

writing the count field subsequent to decrementing a count of buffers for a select queue.

8. The method of claim 4 in which the count fields for queues descriptors are stored in a queue array cache.

9. Apparatus comprising:

a memory containing queue descriptors representing output queues, a queue manager programming engine and a content addressable memory (CAM);

a processor connected to the memory, the processor containing a memory controller, the memory controller having a cache containing a queue descriptor array for storing a subset of the queue descriptors; and

an array in memory for storing a count of queue descriptors in the subset.

10. The apparatus of claim 9 further comprising:

a plurality of microengines.

11. A computer program product residing on a computer readable medium having instructions stored thereon which, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to:

maintain a count field for queue descriptors of active output queues current in a memory.

12. The computer program product of claim 11 in which the count field is a word.

13. The computer program product of claim 11 further comprising instructions to:

write the count field subsequent to incrementing a count of buffers for a selected queue.

14. The computer program product of claim 11 further comprising instructions to:

write the count field subsequent to decrementing a count of buffers for a selected queue.